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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 003299

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARPI, AND NEA/PD
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FELDMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [PTER](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE USING OUTREACH TO THE FAITHFUL TO COMBAT
EXTREMISM

REF: A. ABU DHABI 3161
[1](#)B. STATE 121757

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The UAEG is capitalizing on the nation's reputation as a moderate, tolerant Muslim country to try to persuade its citizens and large expatriate community that extremist-inspired violence has no place in Islam. Through a series of carefully crafted Friday sermons, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs is assertively condemning terrorist violence and warning those responsible for terror attacks that their actions will have dire consequences. "These explosions and killings are against Islamic teachings," a draft of the Friday, July 29 sermon reads. The Friday, July 22 sermon warned, "If someone among Muslims is found deviating from these Islamic values and apostolic teachings, his deviation is personal." The UAEG is reportedly contemplating issuing a "fatwa" (legal opinion) stating that anyone involved in a terrorist attack would be "excommunicated" from the Islamic faith, an Embassy contact has told us. The government requires all 1,500 mosques that deliver Friday sermons to record them. The government justifies the use of recordings, which are used as evidence of an imam's adherence to the approved sermon "guidelines," as a means of preventing extremist preaching. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On July 27, Ambassador met with President Khalifa's Adviser on Religious and Legal Affairs, Al Sayyed Ali bin Al Sayyed Abdul Rahman Al Hashem. The tolerance that the UAE and its leadership are known for "is the true face of Islam,"

Al Hashem said. Ambassador expressed the USG's strong appreciation for the recent Friday sermons condemning terrorism and counseling moderation. Al Hashem said the current Friday sermons represent the UAEG's determination to provide strong moral leadership. The preacher has a "civil and religious link" that empowers him to give guidance to believers, he emphasized. Al Hashem lamented the fact that other Gulf countries were not adequately training their preachers. He said he wished some of the religious scholars in those countries would remain silent. He cited Qatar's Sheikh Al Qardawi as an example of preachers who have become politicized. He also said that there was a major difference between teaching Islam and what "evil people" communicate. He made a point of not including Wahhabism within mainstream Islam. (Note: Al Hashem's father is Saudi and his mother is Bahraini. Though he was born and raised in Bahrain, he now has UAE citizenship. End note) Al Hashem attended the International Islamic Conference in Amman in early July, and has represented the UAE at a dozen seminars and conferences on Islam and tolerance within the past year. "On the Arabian Peninsula, we are born into tolerance," he said.

13. (C) Al Hashem raised Colorado Congressman Tancred's remark about attacking Muslim holy sites, saying that even uninformed Muslim preachers would not say such things. Ambassador replied that Congressman Tancred's statement did not represent USG policy or the American people. Al Hashem noted the important role the U.S. plays in communicating with the Islamic world, and praised Secretary Rice for her positive statements on the roadmap and the Gaza disengagement plan during her recent visit to the region. "The key to peace in the Mideast region is in U.S. hands. The U.S. should keep these channels open," he said. Ambassador praised the UAE for its humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, and cited the planned Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed city in Gaza. Al Hashem said the UAEG would welcome our feedback on future Friday sermons. "Communication is the foundation of Islam," he said.

A Tradition of Preaching About Moderation, Tolerance

14. (C) Pol Chief met separately with Ahmed Al Kindi, Acting Under Secretary for Islamic Affairs at the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs on July 25. The concepts of moderation and tolerance were "planted" by the late President Sheikh Zayed and his sons, Al Kindi said. The UAEG's sermons have always tackled the important questions of the day. Extremist ideology and terrorism happen to be the "hot topics" and are therefore highlighted in the sermons, Al Kindi said. "We are part of this world, and we are faced with security challenges. We should support peace and stability in the world" by issuing relevant sermons, he said.

An Embassy contact told us that there is "behind-the-scenes discussion" about the UAEG issuing a "fatwa" tantamount to excommunication. "Anyone involved in a terrorist act would be excommunicated from the Islamic faith," a term referred to in Arabic as "Al Harm." Our contact said that the UAE is "fully aware" and "can handle" reaction from militants abroad to such a government-sanctioned fatwa. The UAE regards the "internal problem" as the more serious threat, and it is therefore wanting to direct its message about "what Islam is and isn't" at the young people in the UAE.

Sermons That Reflect Current Events

15. (C) Al Kindi produced a draft text for the Friday, July 29, sermon entitled "Islam Forbids the Killing of the Soul" to underscore that the UAEG has been consistent in issuing messages about tolerance and moderation. A national committee headed by Justice Minister Al Dhaheri has been working long hours drafting these sermons and updating them as developments in the world warrant. (Note: A key member of the committee is Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs U/S/ Mohammed Juma Al Dermaki. We have been told another member is Iraqi cleric and Dubai TV talk show host Ahmed Al Qubaisi. End note) The initial July 29 sermon focused on the July 23

Sharm Al Sheikh attacks until the committee received news of the July 24 truck bomb in Baghdad. The draft sermon refers to the killings in Sharm Al Sheikh four times, saying the attack victimized innocent men, women and children. "We should all condemn these disgraceful sinful acts, and condemn the killing of innocent people and the ruin of civilization. ... The killing of one soul is as unjust and aggressive as the killing of many people. ... What will the perpetrators of these crimes say to God on the Day of Judgment about how they have disgraced Islam's reputation by associating it with every extremism and terrorism." The sermon calls for all members of the society to gather their efforts to eliminate deviations from Islam, and fight those against God and his prophet. The sermon ends by confirming the role of scholars, who are described as having wisdom and knowledge of the facts, in revealing the reality of what is happening to the people so that they can distinguish right from wrong. On the Sharm Al Sheikh bombings, the sermon says, "These explosions and killings are against Islamic teachings." A second, shorter, sermon intended to follow the first one on July 29 will talk about the daily killings in Iraq. "After all of what we have seen every day from death, injuries, and destruction, are there any people who are sympathetic with this rotten evil group which destroys land and breaks families and relatives apart?"

Crafting the Message and Monitoring its Delivery

16. (C) In drafting the sermons, the committee is targeting those persons who identify with, or are sympathetic to, "false ideologists," and not the ideologists themselves, Al Kindi said. The UAEG already knows those who have "lost their way" and are trying to manipulate others. The Ministry has also asked each mosque to record its Friday sermons. Al Kindi said the Ministry does this for archival purposes so that it can resolve any dispute that might arise over the sermon's contents after it is delivered. (Comment: We believe these recordings also give the Ministry a means of monitoring the imams and those who read the sermons. End comment.) The UAEG has required these recordings since Operation Enduring Freedom began in 2001.

"Unified Sermons") Control of the Message

17. (C) The sermons are not intended to be political messages, but rather messages about morals and values, Al Kindi said. While he acknowledged that terrorism is a political subject, he said that terrorism is symptomatic of a breakdown of morals and values, and it is therefore appropriate for sermons to address it in this fashion. Al Kindi said all of the UAE's imams receive training from scholars the UAEG periodically brings in to talk about moderation and tolerance. "We choose the right scholars to clean their minds." Asked about the nationalities of imams in the country's approximately 4,000 mosques, Al Kindi said only that "some" were UAE nationals, and that the others were from Egypt and other countries. He said the nationality of an imam does not matter as much as the fact that they are delivering a government-approved "unified" message. He defended the use of "unified sermons," saying that, "without control, people will say what they want. Remember, some people are very, very sick." He credited Justice Minister Al Dhaheri for introducing and enforcing this practice. Before Al Dhaheri was appointed, some imams occasionally criticized other countries' heads of state, prompting angry reactions from those countries' ambassadors to Sheikh Zayed. 07/22 Sermon: "Islam is an Oasis of Tolerance and Security"

18. (U) As is the case every week, on Friday, July 22, preachers in the UAE's 1,500 Sunni and Shi'a mosques where Friday prayers are held were directed by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs to use a government-approved sermon as a guideline. Important sermons such as the ones delivered July 15 and 22 are broadcast on Abu Dhabi TV. Al Kindi said these messages are not simply for the mosques;

they are for people in the homes as well. The sermon focused on the values and morals of Islam, and highlighted the importance the Islamic faith)- and the UAE Government -- places on tolerance and security. "There is nothing in the culture of Islam or its teachings that encourages wanton violence. If someone among Muslims is found deviating from these Islamic values and apostolic teachings, his deviation is personal. ... Look at what violence has brought us at this point in time. A Muslim became a stranger, shunned by people wherever he goes. How much we need to go back to this Islamic humanitarian rational path in which there is improvement for our affairs and the good for all humanity, and it is the salvation from this scourge which extended its evil east, west, north, and south. ... All this signifies the nature of this religion which many Muslims have deviated from, in addition to those who hurt Islam by their behavior on the pretext of defending it, those who hurt by their deeds the beauty of Islam and its mercy with which our apostle was sent to preach justice and good. We need to return to the Book of our God and to the traditions of our apostle to exit the darkness of these tumults. ... The values of religious tolerance brought by Islam are unprecedented in any other belief. ... We must maintain the values of our Islam shining and strong, and call on people to enter into the broad mercy of Allah and his upright religion."

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